

"Wouldn't it have been so COOL to be a gladiator!", my brother Josh said excitedly. We were in our Granddad's study one rainy afternoon, reading one of his big books about life in ancient Roman times. "Are you sure?" I asked.



"It talks about a slave who disguised himself with a mask and was hired to MURDER people. They say he once tried to kill a famous actor on stage, while the performance was actually going on. Scary, huh?" As he read, I could feel a



draught coming from the gap on the shelf. We pulled out some more books. There at the back of the case was a small door with a key in the lock. I turned it, pushed it open and climbed through. Behind the door was a small



room with a cold tiled floor. All around were pots and sacks. "Look what you're wearing, Josh!", I giggled as I saw him poke his head through. But my clothes had changed too.



"Did you know that some of them were forced to fight animals without ANY protection AT ALL?" Josh gulped and quickly moved on to another page. A few moments later, we heard a book fall off the shelf behind us. That's funny, we thought. We hadn't touched it. It was a very old book about discoveries made at a place called Pompeii, a Roman town. A page had come loose in the fall. On it there was a picture of an ugly mask ... "Look at this", said Josh.

THEATRICAL MASKS
A FINE EXAMPLE of an actor's mask was recently unearthed during excavations at Pompeii, the ancient Roman town obliterated by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The mask was that of Charon, the mythological ferryman who rowed dead souls across the river Styx into Hades, the Underworld. The mask was usually associated with gladiator contests, where it was worn by a slave who was tasked with finishing off a defeated gladiator. It is thought that the same slave may have taken his role a little too far and used his disguise in an attempt to assassinate the famous actor Gallus Maximus on stage while the performance was in progress. Fortunately for Gallus, the audience was vigilant



FIG 12. The mask of Charon. The mask signified treachery in ancient Roman theatre.

We crept out of the little room into a much larger one with columns and painted walls. The ceiling was open and sunlight shone through. There was a pool with a statue in the middle of it. People walked by wearing clothes like those in the book we had been just been reading. Could this really be a ROMAN house?! A girl called to us: "This way, you two!"

A GUIDE TO
ANCIENT
ROME



Gallus explained that tomorrow was a Festival Day. If we released Marcus while celebrations were going on, the jailers might not notice.

But on the next day something happened that no one was expecting. The greatest shock of all ...

Vesuvius ERUPTED!!! There was a MASSIVE explosion just before noon. People ran into the streets to see smoke and ash shoot up into the sky. We stared up at the volcano, too TERRIFIED to move.

VOLCANOES

an essential guide

